DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 437 473 UD 033 264

AUTHOR	Ferguson, Dianne L.
TITLE	On Working Together: Groupwork, Teamwork, and Collaborative Work among Educators. On Point...Brief Discussions of Critical Issues in Urban Education.
INSTITUTION	Education Development Center, Inc., Newton, MA.; Education Development Center, Newton, MA. National Inst. for Urban School Improvement.
SPONS AGENCY	Special Education Programs (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	11p.
CONTRACT	H086C70005.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: <http://www.edc.org/urban> (in English and Spanish).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Cooperation; Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; *Interprofessional Relationship; *Regular and Special Education Relationship; *Teachers; *Teamwork; Time Management; Urban Education
IDENTIFIERS	Reform Efforts

ABSTRACT

As schools reform for the 21st century, educators are being asked to work together in more and more ways. Many have not been prepared to work together, and little additional time is being allocated for collaborative work. Two solutions are worth consideration: (1) to make more time and (2) to use time more effectively. As teachers and other school professionals learn to work together in groupwork, teamwork, and collaborative work, they will learn more about each other. A new breed of teacher, a hybrid prepared to work with general and special education students, will probably develop which will possess the information and skills necessary to work with diverse groups of students. (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 437 473

Brief discussions
of critical issues in
Urban Education

On Working Together:
Groupwork, Teamwork, and Collaborative Work Among Educators

Dianne L. Ferguson

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
URBAN SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

UD033264

Working Together:

Groupwork, Teamwork, and Collaborative Work Among Teachers

As schools restructure and reform for the 21st Century, educators are being required to work together in more and more ways. To name just a few:

- *School professionals must articulate a mission and work collaboratively to achieve it.*
- *School professionals must collect and interpret a wide variety of information to insure that their students are succeeding at higher and higher levels of achievement in alignment with curriculum frameworks and standards.*
- *When achievement data do not support current efforts, faculty must collaboratively problem solve ways to improve achievement outcomes.*
- *General and special educators must collaborate in using state standards and curriculum frameworks to design curriculum and teaching for each student, including students with disabilities.*

Teachers must collaboratively inquire into their practice in order to continue to learn and improve as professionals.

School professionals must collaborate with families and community members to tailor school efforts and curriculum to local standards and needs while aligning with state standards and frameworks. Three Issues:

Challenging the Demand to "Work Together"

FIRST, most educators were not specifically prepared to work together in these many different ways. Historically, teachers were prepared for "individual practice" rather than "group practice." Teachers were expected to take their students, close their doors, and do their jobs. Working together demanded little more than the polite acknowledgement and exchange that could be accomplished over lunch in the staff room. Despite requirements since 1975 that general and special educators plan together with parents the individualized educational programs for students with disabilities, the overall demands and practices have changed little until recently. Teachers have generally been responsible for their *own* students and provided general support, but little real assistance to other teachers or their students. Even as groups of teachers try to plan and work together, this overriding responsibility for *my students* still dominates teacher talk.

> We know that successful schools take good collegial staffs and patterns of relationships that reinforce every person in the building working together.

SECOND, despite growing demands, most schools and teachers have found little additional **time** allocated for such collective work. Most teachers rarely have more than one paid "prep" period per day during which they can barely plan the tasks they will need to complete on their own time. Given how little time teachers are paid outside of time with students, it's not surprising that they often seem reluctant to volunteer time for working

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

together on the variety of projects currently urged. It is an impressive testament to teachers' commitment that current demands for working together are being addressed at all by educators.

THIRD, the most common description of working together is "collaborative" work. Educators are being asked to collaborate with each other, with administrators and district officials, with students, with parents, and with community members. What most realize after the first few experiences with any of these demands is that "collaboration" requires a lot of time and meetings. In fact, collaboration is hard work that takes time, commitment, skills, and the kind of continuity that helps to build a shared understanding. Since **time** is such a limited and prized commodity in most schools, even the most eager teachers can be reluctant to take on the commitment to learn to collaborate.

col·lab·o·rate *intr.v.* 1. to work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort

Two Solutions: One Harder, One Easier

Solution 1:

Make Time:

In some countries teachers are routinely paid for 6-10 hours per week of preparation time. Working together requires this commitment. Until our systems make time to work together a legitimate part of teacher's contracts, schools are doing their best to be creative.

More and more districts have one early release day per week (usually right after lunch). Some are beginning to explore the four-day school week. Four days might be scheduled a little longer (say, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.), but one day a week would be reserved for teacher work. The organization of teams and creative scheduling can sometimes create shared worktime for the teams. Scheduling joint prep times and lunch hours also sometimes works to provide

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

teams with more time together even when they don't use all of it for work. Schools sometimes buy "extra" prep periods so groups of faculty can work together. Still other schools regularly offer school wide integrated learning activities that are managed by half the faculty while the remaining faculty meet for planning and other tasks.

Solution 2:

Use Time More Effectively:

Teachers' instincts and experiences are correct. Collaborative work takes a lot of time. One way to use limited and precious time more effectively is to work in a variety of ways. Not all ways of working together require lots of time. Reserve only those tasks and topics that require collaborative work for the longer blocks of time available and use shorter blocks of time for other kinds of collective work like groupwork and teamwork.

GROUPWORK is a form of collective work where educators come together to ***share*** ideas, strategies, even possible solutions. Each member has their own ***individual task***, but these separate tasks can benefit from hearing what colleagues are doing or have done with similar tasks. In ***groupwork*** there is no common outcome and no expectation that members will even use each other's ideas (though teachers have a long history of "creative borrowing"). The commitment in groupwork is to share and listen. Sometimes sharing involves sharing feedback if you think you have experience that might help another member of the group adjust their ideas in ways that might be more effective or successful, but ***exchange*** is the overriding purpose and outcome of groupwork.

TEAMWORK might involve individual tasks, but usually involves some kind of collective task. A good example is the IEP meeting where each member is contributing part of a collectively written document that is supposed to reflect the collective wisdom of the group. Unlike groupwork, which relies on

exchange, teamwork relies on *discussion*. Discussion occurs when each member shares their view, and is heard by the rest of the group. Discussion requires fairness so that each member's ideas are aired and shared in a balanced way. It can take more time than exchange, but with practice, a timekeeper, and a few rules, groups can create fair discussions that are also time efficient.

Since the tasks are usually collective, the natural outcome of teamwork discussions are *negotiation and compromise*. While no members might get all their own way, the outcome always reflects the best thinking and priorities of each group member. Teamwork can be quite efficient since it results in everyone feeling that his or her point of view is adequately represented and accounted. The discussion helps to identify each person's highest priorities and the negotiation and compromise helps to synthesize these into an outcome that reflects the group's collective priorities for success.

COLLABORATIVE WORK also typically involves a collective task, but one that requires the energy and commitment of *dialogue and consensus*. These requirements account for the time required. Dialogue is a discussion that moves beyond balance and fairness to create a synergy that produces new ideas that no member of the group would have thought of on their own.

We have all been in a group discussion where people start to get animated, louder, and even start to interrupt each other as new ideas began to springboard off each other's comments. Soon the group

syn·er·gy n., 1. The interaction of two or more agents or forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects. 2. Cooperative interaction among groups that creates an enhanced combined effect.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

realized that they have created a whole new idea, solution, or way to think about the situation. It is just this synergy that can grow out of a discussion that moves to dialogue. The difference is in how the listeners think. In a discussion we listen to try to understand the other member's points of view so we can edit and adjust our own. In a dialogue, the listening becomes the antecedent of our own contribution to what will become new knowledge we all share.

A New Future: Group Practice

As teachers and other school professionals learn to work together in these (groupwork, teamwork, collobarative work) and other ways, they will also learn about each other. The different skills and roles any general and special educators, specialists and families will begin to diminish as working together "cross pollinates" these capacities creating a new variety of "hybrid" professional. These new groups of teachers can bring to any task a common store knowledge and skills as well as different areas of specialty. Only groups of teachers are likely to possess the wide range of information and skills really needed to work with today's diverse groups of students.

I work in a school system... that takes all of their special services teachers, their school psychologist, their speech language person, their school counselor, their bilingual teacher, their ESL teacher, and their Title I teacher... into teaching teams. It's a very low-income predominately Hispanic community... They have teaching teams that are composed of some teachers from General Ed and then all of those other specialists. The specialists do not deliver services to every kid who is supposed to be on their caseload. They deliver services to a cadre of kids. They have separate sets of teams that—because of those individual peoples' competencies, in terms of being effective working with kids who have behavioral challenges, or kids who have second language learning issues—they put them together that way and they deliver services that way. The district gets a waiver from the state in order to deliver services that way... They have found that delivering services in that way is incredibly effective for kids...and of equal importance is that the teachers themselves who are working on those teams, are becoming better teachers, because of the way that they work together.

Patrice Hall, Executive Director of Student Services, Denver Public Schools

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Notes

On Points may be reproduced for broad dissemination and can be accessed in English or Spanish on the National Institute's Web site at: http://www.edc.org/urban.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
URBAN SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT

Center for Program Improvement
University of Colorado at Denver
1380 Lawrence Street, 6th Floor
Denver, CO 80202
Tel: (303) 556-3990
Fax: (303) 556-6142
TTY or TDD: (800) 659-2656

Center for Research Synthesis and Product Development
University of Oregon
1235 University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403-1235
Tel: (541) 346-2888
Fax: (541) 346-2471
TTY: (541) 346-2487

Center for Marketing, Networking, and Utilization
Education Development Center, Inc.
55 Chapel Street
Newton, MA 02458
Tel: (617) 969-7100, ext. 2105
Fax: (617) 969-3440
TTY: (617) 964-5448

E-mail: niusi@edc.org
http://www.edc.org/urban

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Award No. H086C70003

BEST COPY AVAILABLE